

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
NORTHERN DIVISION

TABEUS DEWAYNE ROBINSON,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	CASE NO. 2:21-CV-786-ECM-SRW
)	[WO]
CHILTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE,)	
et al.,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

RECOMMENDATION OF THE MAGISTRATE JUDGE

This case is before the Court on a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint filed by Tabeus Robinson [“Robinson”], an inmate incarcerated at the Chilton County Jail in Clanton, Alabama. Robinson challenges the constitutionality of actions taken against him in proceedings concerning his payment of child support. Robinson names as defendants the Chilton County Courthouse and child support Judge Walter Hayden. Robinson requests that the Court take legal action against Judge Hayden based on his involvement in Robinson’s child support case. Doc. No. 1 at 2–4. Upon review, the Court concludes that dismissal of this case prior to service of process is appropriate under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

I. STANDARD OF REVIEW

Because Robinson is proceeding *in forma pauperis*, the court reviews his complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).¹ Under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a court must dismiss a complaint

¹ The predecessor to this section is 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d). Even though Congress made many substantive changes to § 1915(d) when it enacted 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2)(B), the frivolity and the failure to state a claim analysis contained in *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989), was unaltered. *Bilal v. Driver*, 251

proceeding *in forma pauperis* if it determines that an action is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant immune from such relief. A claim is frivolous when it “has little or no chance of success,” that is, when it appears “from the face of the complaint that the factual allegations are clearly baseless or that the legal theories are indisputably meritless.” *Carroll v. Gross*, 984 F.2d 392, 393 (11th Cir. 1993). A claim is also frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis in law or fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). A claim is frivolous as a matter of law where, among other things, the defendants are immune from suit, *id.* at 327, the claim seeks to enforce a right that clearly does not exist, *id.*, or there is an affirmative defense that would defeat the claim, such as the statute of limitations, *Clark v. Georgia Pardons & Paroles Bd.*, 915 F.2d 636, 640 n.2 (11th Cir. 1990). Courts are accorded “not only the authority to dismiss [as frivolous] a claim based on indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless.” *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327.

A complaint may be dismissed under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted “only if it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the allegations.” *Hishon v. King & Spalding*, 467 U.S. 69, 73 (1984) (*citing Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)). A review on this ground is governed by the same standards as dismissals for failure

F.3d 1346, 1349 (11th Cir. 2001); *Brown v. Bargery*, 207 F.3d 863, 866 n.4 (6th Cir. 2000). However, dismissal under § 1915(e)(2)(B) is now mandatory. *Bilal*, 251 F.3d at 1348-49.

to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *See Jones v. Bock*, 549 U.S. 199, 215 (2007). To state a claim upon which relief may be granted, “a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (internal quotation marks omitted). To state a claim to relief that is plausible, the plaintiff must plead factual content that “allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* The allegations should present a “plain statement possess[ing] enough heft to show that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 557 (2007) (internal quotation marks omitted). “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. When a successful affirmative defense, such as a statute of limitations, appears on the face of a complaint, dismissal for failure to state a claim is also warranted. *Jones*, 549 U.S. at 215.

Pro se pleadings “are held to a less stringent standard than pleadings drafted by attorneys” and are liberally construed. *Boxer X v. Harris*, 437 F.3d 1107, 1110 (11th Cir. 2006). However, they “must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555. And a court does not have “license . . . to rewrite an otherwise deficient pleading [by a *pro se* litigant] in order to sustain an action.” *GJR Investments v. County of Escambia, Fla.*, 132 F.3d 1359, 1369 (11th Cir. 1998), *overruled on other grounds by Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009). While the Court treats factual allegations as true, it does not treat as true conclusory assertions or a recitation of a cause of action’s elements. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 681. Finally, a *pro se* litigant “is subject to the relevant law and rules of

court including the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.” *Moon v. Newsome*, 863 F.2d 835, 837 (11th Cir. 1989).

II. DISCUSSION

Robinson, who is disabled, makes child support payments through his disability income, his VA check, and “out-of-pocket.” Judge Hayden, whom Robinson states was his law school professor, is presiding over his child support case, which Robinson maintains constitutes a conflict of interest. Despite this alleged conflict of interest, Judge Hayden has issued rulings and decisions in the challenged proceedings including subjecting Robinson to fines and imprisonment. 1 at 2–3.

A. The Chilton County Courthouse

Robinson names the Chilton County Courthouse as a defendant. The law is settled that

in order to state a claim for relief under Section 1983, a plaintiff must satisfy two elements. First, a plaintiff must allege that an act or omission deprived him “of some right, privilege, or immunity secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States.” *Hale v. Tallapoosa Cty.*, 50 F.3d 1579, 1582 (11th Cir. 1995). Second, a plaintiff must allege that the act or omission was committed by “a person acting under color of state law.” *Id.* While local governments qualify as “persons” under Section 1983, state agencies and penal institutions are generally not considered legal entities subject to suit. *See Grech v. Clayton Cty.*, 335 F.3d 1326, 1343 (11th Cir. 2003). Consequently, a county jail [is] not [a] viable defendant[] under Section 1983. *Williams v. Chatham Cty. Sheriff’s Complex*, Case No. 4:07-CV-68, 2007 WL 2345243, at *1 (S.D. Ga. Aug. 14, 2007) (“The county jail . . . has no independent legal identity and therefore is not an entity that is subject to suit under Section 1983.”).

Bell v. Brown, 2017 WL 3473845, at *5 (S.D. Ga. Aug. 11, 2017); *see Ex parte Dixon*, 55 So.3d 1171, 1172 n.1 (Ala. 2010) (“Generally, the departments and subordinate entities of

municipalities, counties, and towns that are not separate legal entities or bodies do not have the capacity to sue or be sued in the absence of specific statutory authority.”).

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that the Chilton County Courthouse is not a legal entity subject to suit, and it is, therefore, due to be dismissed as a defendant under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i).

B. Judge Hayden

1. Declaratory or Injunctive Relief

a. Non-Final Orders. Robinson’ allegations against Judge Hayden concern rulings or decisions he made in his judicial capacity during state court proceedings over which he had jurisdiction. To the extent that Robinson seeks relief from adverse decisions issued by Judge Hayden which are not yet final, he is not entitled to relief from this Court on such claims, as he has an adequate remedy at law. *Bolin v. Story*, 225 F.3d 1234, 1242 (11th Cir. 2000) (holding that “[i]n order to receive declaratory or injunctive relief, plaintiff[] must establish that there was a [constitutional] violation, that there is a serious risk of continuing irreparable injury if the relief is not granted, and the absence of an adequate remedy at law.”). Specifically, Robinson may appeal orders issued by the state court to the appropriate higher state court. Since state law provides an adequate remedy for Robinson to challenge non-final orders, he is “not entitled to declaratory or injunctive relief in this case.” *Id.* at 1243.

b. Final Orders. Regarding claims presented by Robinson challenging the constitutionality of orders issued by Judge Hayden which have become final under state law, this Court lacks jurisdiction to render such judgment in an action filed under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. “The *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine prevents ... lower federal courts from exercising

jurisdiction over cases brought by ‘state-court losers’ challenging ‘state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceedings commenced.’ *Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Saudi Basic Industries Corp.*, 544 U.S. 280, 284, 125 S.Ct. 1517, 161 L.Ed.2d 454 (2005).” *Lance v. Dennis*, 546 U.S. 459, 460 (2006). Although “*Rooker-Feldman* is a narrow doctrine,” it is applicable to bar Robinson from proceeding before this Court, as this case, regarding any claims challenging final orders issued by a state court, is “ ‘brought by [a] state-court loser[] complaining of injuries caused by state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceedings commenced and inviting district court review and rejection of those judgments.’ 544 U.S. at 284, 125 S.Ct. [at] 1517.” *Lance*, 546 U.S. at 464; *District of Columbia Court of Appeals v. Feldman*, 460 U.S. 462, 486 (1983) (holding that federal district courts “do not have jurisdiction . . . over challenges to state court decisions in particular cases arising out of judicial proceedings even if those challenges allege that the state court’s action was unconstitutional.”). Moreover, a § 1983 action is inappropriate either to compel or to appeal a particular course of action by a state court. *Datz v. Kilgore*, 51 F.3d 252, 254 (11th Cir. 1995) (holding that a § 1983 suit arising from alleged erroneous decisions of a state court is merely a prohibited appeal of the state court judgment); *see also Rolleston v. Eldridge*, 848 F.2d 163 (11th Cir. 1988).

In light of the foregoing, the Court concludes that dismissal of the request for relief from final actions undertaken by Judge Hayden during proceedings related to Robinson’s state court child support case is appropriate under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i). *See Clark*, 915 F.2d 636; *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327.

III. CONCLUSION

Accordingly, the undersigned Magistrate Judge RECOMMENDS this case be DISMISSED with prejudice prior to service of process under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i);

It is ORDERED that objections to the Recommendation may be filed **by January 5, 2022**. Any objections filed must specifically identify the factual findings and legal conclusions in the Magistrate Judge's Recommendation to which a party objects. Frivolous, conclusive or general objections will not be considered by the District Court. Plaintiff is advised this Recommendation is not a final order and, therefore, it is not appealable. Failure to file a written objection to the proposed findings and recommendations in the Magistrate Judge's report shall bar a party from a *de novo* determination by the District Court of factual findings and legal issues covered in the report and shall "waive the right to challenge on appeal the District Court's order based on unobjected-to factual and legal conclusions" except upon grounds of plain error if necessary in the interests of justice. 11TH Cir. R. 3-1; *see Resolution Trust Co. v. Hallmark Builders, Inc.*, 996 F.2d 1144, 1149 (11th Cir. 1993); *Henley v. Johnson*, 885 F.2d 790, 794 (11th Cir. 1989).

DONE, on this the 21st day of December, 2021.

/s/ Susan Russ Walker
Susan Russ Walker
United States Magistrate Judge